

## **This brochure is NOT meant to cover all aspects of mold, only to provide a brief overview.**

Molds grow in damp places, so the wet Louisiana climate is perfect for mold growth. **Controlling moisture is the key to stopping indoor mold growth.** If you can see the mold, testing is not advised by federal/state health and environmental agencies. This is because testing does not give information for stopping or cleaning up mold growth. Property owners are responsible for the costs of mold testing and cleanup. There are no state agencies in Louisiana that test or clean up mold. People who provide cleanup services must follow the Louisiana Revised Statute 37:2181-37:2192. This law passed as Act 880 of the 2003 Legislative Session. This law will help protect the health and safety of Louisiana residents by making sure contractors know how to clean up mold.

*For more information, call the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors at 225-765-2301 or call toll free 800-256-1392 or visit their website at [www.lslbc.state.la.us](http://www.lslbc.state.la.us).*

## **What is Mold?**

Molds are types of fungi. Mildew is another word for mold. We all breathe in small amounts of mold daily. Mold grows indoors when mold spores come in contact with wet areas. Therefore, molds grow in damp, moist areas of buildings. You can find molds in places with water damage, high humidity and dampness. Some common molds are Cladosporium, Penicillium, Alternaria, Aspergillus, and Mucor.

## **What are “Toxic Molds” or “Black Toxic Molds”?**

“Toxic molds” are those molds that produce compounds called mycotoxins. Mycotoxins are produced as a defense against other microorganisms. “Black toxic mold” can refer to a certain type of mold – *Stachybotrys chartarum* (also known as *Stachybotrys atra*). This type of mold usually grows on very wet materials, and grows as a result of long-term water problems (high humidity, water leaks, water damage, or flooding). Constant moisture is needed for this mold to grow. Black is a color, not a type of mold. Therefore, not all black molds are *Stachybotrys chartarum*. There is no clinical test to determine if you have been exposed to this type of mold.

## **Can mold cause health problems?**

Molds can produce allergens, irritants and in some cases toxins. Breathing or touching mold spores may cause an allergic response in some people and worsen breathing problems such as asthma. Common reactions to mold are cough, congestion, runny nose, burning eyes, headaches, sneezing and sore throat. Children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with weak immune systems may be more sensitive to mold. If you have any health concerns, talk to your doctor.

## **What causes mold to grow indoors?**

Common causes of mold growth are roof and plumbing leaks, high humidity or cold spots in buildings, flooding and broken/clogged gutters and drains. Signs of mold growth include staining on surfaces, musty odor, dark spots on or around vents, water stains and peeling or curling of vinyl floors or wallpaper. Mold is found in bathrooms, on windows, behind water heaters and in kitchens. Mold may be found on ceilings, walls, sheet rock, books, wood and clothing.

## **What should be done if mold is found indoors?**

Indoor mold growth can be stopped by controlling indoor moisture. If mold is present indoors, the mold should be removed and the moisture problem fixed as soon as possible. If mold is removed without fixing the moisture problem, the mold will return. In most cases, if the area of mold growth is small (less than 10 square feet) you can clean it yourself. It is important to remove mold by scrubbing with detergent and water, and then drying the area fully and quickly. If there is a lot of mold growth on certain porous materials like carpet, sheetrock, or insulation, it should be removed and replaced. Use protection, such as gloves, an N-95 breathing mask, eye goggles, long sleeves and pants when cleaning up mold. This is important because during cleanup of mold, spores can be released into the air. You may want to talk with an expert if the area of growth is large or if you have health conditions that can be worsened by mold.

## **How do I stop mold from growing indoors?**

Controlling moisture is crucial to stopping mold growth. Cleaning up mold when you see it is important, but it will return if you do not fix the water problem. To prevent mold growth, homeowners and property owners should:

- Quickly fix water leaks and stop water from going into homes and buildings.
- Fully dry wet building materials, furnishings and carpets within 48 hours of getting wet, if possible.
- Replace water-damaged items as soon as possible.
- Make sure that heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) systems are always running, to keep the right amount of air flowing inside of the building.
- Keep indoor relative humidity below 60% (ideally, between 30% and 50%). Good airflow and dehumidifiers help to keep humidity low.
- Check roofs, ceilings, walls, floors and carpets for water leaks, mold growth, or musty odors.
- Do not let sprinklers hit buildings or homes.
- Fix broken roof gutters.
- Routinely replace air conditioner filters and clean drip pans.
- Make sure stoves/ovens, bathrooms and clothes dryers are vented to the outside of the home, if possible.

## **What are the steps to clean up mold?**

1. Find and fix the moisture problem.
2. Shut off all heat or air conditioning to stop mold spores from spreading around the home or building. If possible, turn on a fan in a window to exhaust the air to the outdoors.
3. Remove, bag, and throw out materials that have heavy mold growth (i.e. ceiling tiles, leather, sheetrock, plaster, paneling, wood products, paper, carpet, padding, etc.)
4. Use detergent in hot water and scrub the moldy area. Use a hard brush or cleaning pad on rough areas.
5. Rinse the whole area with hot water. A wet-dry vacuum can be used to pick up extra water.
6. Fully dry the area for two or three days. Raising the temperature and using dehumidifiers and fans will help speed drying.
7. Vacuum your home with a HEPA - filtered vacuum, if available.
8. Protect yourself by wearing long sleeves, pants, gloves and an N-95 respirator.

## Do I need to test or sample for mold?

In most cases, if you can see mold growing you do not need to do any sampling/ testing. It can be costly. Results cannot be used to decide if a building has safe levels of mold or mold spores. The steps to clean up and stop mold growth are the same for all molds. Stopping mold growth is more important than knowing the type of mold. If a professional is hired to remediate indoor mold, sampling/testing may be useful in determining whether the cleanup was successful. The best way to find mold growth is by using your eyes to look for it and by using your nose to find the source of a moldy odor. If there is a damp, earthy or musty smell, mold may be present. Other clues are signs of moisture or the worsening of allergies.

## How do I hire professional help?

If there has been a lot of water damage and/or mold growth that covers more than 10 square feet, you should consider hiring a mold assessor and/or a mold cleanup company. You will need professional help if your HVAC system has mold growing inside of it, or if the water/mold damage was caused by sewage or other contaminated water. When hiring an expert or company to provide cleanup services you should consider:

- company experience in solving similar problems, which includes training and skills of the people doing the work
- quality of the work plan
- company reputation (check with the Better Business Bureau)
  - ♦ company knowledge of local codes and regional climate conditions
  - ♦ cost
- Ask for references

Make sure contractors have valid licenses, if required. Effective July 1, 2004 persons who provide mold cleanup services must have a Mold Remediation Contractor's License with the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors. This is in accordance with Act 880 of the 2003 Legislative Session and is found in R.S. 37:2181—37:2192. This law also forbids contractors from performing both mold testing and cleanup on the same property. You may be able to find help by looking in the yellow pages of your telephone book under "Engineers," "Environmental Consultants," "Environmental Services," "Laboratories-Testing," or "Industrial Hygienists". Building managers may want to get referrals from other building managers when selecting an environmental consultant or company.

## What should I know about mold when buying a home or property in Louisiana?

According to the Louisiana Real Estate License Law and the Rules and Regulations of the Louisiana Real Estate Commission, real estate agents must disclose any known "large" defects or future defects in the property. When buying a home or property, it is important to ask about any current or previous defects in the property. According to Act 308 of the 2003 Legislative Session (R.S. 9:3196—9:3199), a seller of residential property in Louisiana must provide a Property Disclosure Statement, which should include information on previous or current mold problems.

## Is mold damage covered by my homeowner's insurance policy?

A homeowner's policy covers sudden and accidental damage caused by the events listed in the policy, like fire or damage from a storm or the sudden bursting of a water pipe. Damage caused by mold may not be listed in your policy. Your Louisiana homeowner's policy will not cover the costs of mold testing in the house, steps taken to keep mold from spreading or to get rid of mold. These costs will not be covered even if the company has paid for mold damage due to a covered claim (such as damage from a rainstorm). It is very important that homeowners review their current policy or talk to their insurance agent about mold damage.

### Where can I find additional resources?

For more information on mold-related issues, including cleanup and moisture control, you may want to refer to the following agencies and organizations:

- American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) – [www.aiha.org](http://www.aiha.org)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) [www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/mold](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/mold)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – [www.epa.gov/iaq/molds](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/molds) or 1-800-438-4318
- Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals, Office of Public Health (DHH/OPH) – [www.oph.dhh.louisiana.gov](http://www.oph.dhh.louisiana.gov) or 1-888-293-7020
- Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors – [www.lslbc.state.la.us](http://www.lslbc.state.la.us) or 1-800-256-1392

Information for property owners may be found by contacting the following agencies:

- Louisiana Department of Insurance (LDI) - [www.lti.state.la.us](http://www.lti.state.la.us) or 1-800-259-5300
- Louisiana Real Estate Commission – [www.lrec.state.la.us](http://www.lrec.state.la.us) or 1-800-821-4529

# MOLD

Louisiana Department of  
Health & Hospitals  
Public Information Series  
Section of Environmental  
Epidemiology &  
Toxicology



## What You Need To Know About Your Health and Your Property

### References

CDC/NCEH Fact sheet: Molds in the Environment  
EPA, A Brief Guide to Mold, Moisture, and Your Home  
EPA, Mold Remediation in Schools and Commercial Buildings  
Louisiana House Bill 1328, Act 880, 2003 Regular Legislative Session (R.S. 37:2181—37:2192)  
Louisiana House Bill 92/ Act 308, 2003 Regular Legislative Session (R.S. 9:3196—9:3199)